

# Spheres of Control and Developmental Crisis in Middle-Aged Women: A Cross-Role Analysis of Homemakers, Working Professionals and Entrepreneurs

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## INTRODUCTION

### BACKGROUND

Wethington defined Midlife Crisis as “the realization of aging, physical decline, or entrapment in specific roles can cause mental turmoil and abrupt changes in aims and lifestyles” (Wethington, 2000).

Midlife crisis results from complex interaction between various social, psychological, and biological elements.

### Midlife crisis is often characterised by:

1. Frantic overload from juggling the multiple roles as parent as well as caregiver for elderly(Riley & Bowen, 2005),
2. A sense of loneliness from children leaving home (otherwise characterised as empty nest syndrome (Mitchell, 2009),
3. Physical aging and menopause in women (Lachman, 2001)

Women’s experience of Midlife crisis is unique to their socio-cultural, economic and ethnic affiliations and therefore interventions must be tailored to their backgrounds (Wray, 2007; Ward, Scheid, & Tuffrey, 2010; Mahadeen, Halabi, & Callister, 2008).

Well-being during the mid-life is associated with adequate social support, positive views about life and ageing well (McQuaide, 1998).

Additionally, general well being and satisfaction were found to be higher among women with high-income partners as compared to those with low-income partners (Waldegrave & Cameron, 2010).

The concept of the "midlife crisis" has garnered significant attention and research, typically linked to men experiencing existential issues through purchases of expensive sports vehicles or sudden career changes (Johnson, 2017). Whatever the case, women's strategies for navigating the field are varied and intricate, and they are frequently greatly impacted by societal norms surrounding paid work, domestic work, and entrepreneurship. It is critical for women's personal growth as well as for the workplace, cultural norms, and gender equality to comprehend how women in a variety of professional jobs deal with the challenges of their middle years (Wilson & Garcia, 2022).

Entrepreneurial pursuits blend personal and professional identities, presenting a unique environment where a midlife crisis may emerge (Adams, 2016). Women entrepreneurs must balance personal happiness with business management, financial stability, and family responsibilities (Smith & Johnson, 2018). The challenges of maintaining work-life balance, fostering innovation, and adapting objectives to meet changing social

expectations deeply influence midlife narratives (Brown, 2019).

For homemakers, transitioning from primary caregivers to possibly re-entering the workforce involves considerable shifts in roles and responsibilities. This shift often evokes a wide range of emotions and challenges that significantly impact their ability to transition successfully (Robinson, 2020; Taylor, 2017). Their sense of individuality, purpose, and societal validation is closely tied to their efforts to regain skills, build self-confidence, and manage interpersonal relationships within the family (Garcia & Lee, 2021).

Working women with fixed incomes face specific challenges and opportunities as they approach midlife (Clark, 2018). They represent a large portion of the global workforce, and their stories reflect broader changes in work environments, gender roles, and organizational structures, including moving up the corporate ladder to support work-life policies (Adams & Brown, 2020). Navigating leadership aspirations and overcoming systemic barriers to success are key themes for women in this stage of life (Williams, 2019).

The narratives of women undergoing midlife experiences tend to consistently revolve around the themes of introspection, re-evaluation of their self-identity, and the pursuit of candor in the role; these themes are found to be prevailing regardless of the vocational position held by the individual (Jones et al., 2021). Furthermore, the amalgamation of variables such as ethnicity, social class, and social standards i.e. the different spheres in which women engage, increases the complexity of their experiences, requiring a detailed and sophisticated approach to research and acceptance (Robinson & Taylor, 2019).

Spheres of control are the parameters that people can choose from to further their objectives or interests, influence the decisions of others, and mould their surroundings. It recognizes that influence and power are not uniformly dispersed throughout life but rather are influenced by a variety of circumstances. Three categories make up the realms of control scale: interpersonal, socio-political, and personal control.

The term "personal control" describes how someone feels about their capacity to direct, affect, and manage their own life circumstances, decisions, and consequences. It recognizes the extent to which people can choose, establish objectives, and behave in ways that are consistent with their beliefs and aspirations (Johnson, 2015). In life, interpersonal control is the idea that one can direct, control, and influence one's connections, relationships, and interactions with other people (Clark, 2014). The term "socio-political control" defines the power that institutions, governments, and social structures have over the people and groups that make up a society. People's behaviours, attitudes, actions, and access to resources are just a few of the ways in which this control can affect people's lives in a variety of ways (Anderson, 2013).

The assessment focuses on middle-aged women's varying realms of control, which include homemaking, employment, and entrepreneurship. Middle-aged women's personal power in the home would include their ability to decide how to run the household, assign responsibilities, and make decisions regarding family concerns (Smith, 2017). The personal control of middle-aged working women is determined by their degree of involvement in the workforce, equality in job chances, freedom to pick their professional path, and methods for advancing their careers (Brown, 2018). When it comes to middle-aged women who pursue entrepreneurship, personal control entails making business decisions, establishing their schedules, and creating their chances (Wilson, 2016).

The ability of middle-aged women to negotiate and handle relationships within the household, including those with their spouses, children, and other family members, is referred to as interpersonal control (Jones, 2017). Interpersonal control for middle-aged professional women includes the capacity to make decisions, speak out when necessary, and manage relationships with clients, coworkers, and superiors. Women's ability to establish their interpersonal control can occasionally be challenged by gender dynamics and power disparities in the workplace (Taylor, 2019). The ability to effectively lead and manage teams, settle disputes, and foster a positive organisational culture are additional interpersonal control factors for middle-aged women

entrepreneurs (Martinez, 2016).

The capacity to fight for their rights and interests both inside the family unit and in society at large is a key component of middle-aged homemaking women's sociopolitical control. Through action, campaigning, and participation in neighbourhood organisations that deal with problems like family law reform, they might try to exert socio-political control (Miller, 2015). According to Johnson (2016), middle-aged women have socio-political control in the workplace when it comes to their capacity to shape workplace culture, labour laws, and legal safeguards against harassment and discrimination. The ability to manoeuvre through legal frameworks, obtain resources and support systems, and lobby for laws that promote an atmosphere that is favourable to business expansion are all components of socio-political control in entrepreneurship (Davis, 2017).

This study aims to provide a thorough investigation into the experiences of women in different vocational settings during midlife crisis, with the goal of highlighting the complex dynamics involved (Smith, 2022). This study strives to enhance our understanding of human development in the modern world by highlighting the perspectives and experiences of women in midlife. By doing so, it seeks to promote inclusivity, fairness, and empathy (Adams et al., 2021).

## METHOD

The study followed a cross sectional design, 139 middle-aged women (35-65 years) participated in the study.

## PARTICIPANTS

The study involved participants from 3 different broad occupational roles: Homemakers; Salaried Workers; Entrepreneurs. Multi-method sampling was used to recruit these different groups. Individuals with mental illnesses and physical disabilities were excluded from the study.

Homemakers (N=55) from 3 different apartment associations from Chennai were recruited through convenience sampling procedures. The mean age of the Homemakers was 46.891 years (SD = 5.862) and ranged between 35 and 62 years. Salaried Workers (N=54) were recruited from UEV SocioLadder Technologies Pvt. L.td through convenience sampling procedures. The mean age of Salaried Workers was 46.296 years (SD = 6.049) and ranged between 35 and 57 years. Entrepreneurs (N= 30) were recruited through snow-ball sampling. The mean age of Entrepreneurs was 45.9 years (SD = 5.505) and ranged between 35 and 56 years.

## EDI STATEMENT

The study ensures representation from diverse occupational roles and respects the unique perspectives of middle-aged women from different backgrounds. The analysis will consider potential differences in experiences and perceptions among homemakers, salaried workers, and entrepreneurs, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of developmental crises and locus of control.

## MEASURES

The study consisted of demographic questions (Age, Family Structure, Marital Status & Role) and validated psychometric measures (Developmental Crisis Questionnaire - 12 and Spheres of Control - 3) Developmental Crisis Questionnaire - 12

The Developmental Crisis Questionnaire (DCQ-12) is a validated measure of adult developmental crisis, developed by Petrov, Robinson, and Arnett. The DCQ-12 was developed based on common features of crisis that are consistent across early adult, midlife, and later life crises, making it applicable across all adult age groups. The DCQ-12 is structured around three factors: 1)Disconnection and Distress; 2)Lack of Clarity and Control; 3)Transition and Turning Point. All items are presented on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The DCQ-12 has shown good predictive validity and four-week test-retest reliability. (Petrov, N., 2022)

### Spheres of Control - 3

The Spheres of Control Scale (SOC-3) is a psychometric instrument developed by Delroy Paulhus in 1983 , and updated to version 3 in 1990 to measure an individual's beliefs about the amount of control they have over their life. The SOC-3 differentiates the construct Locus of Control into three major spheres of life: 1)Personal Control; 2)Interpersonal Control; 3)Socio-Political Control.

The SOC-3 consists of 30 statements that must be rated on a seven-point scale (where 1=Agree, 5=Neutral, and 7=Disagree). The score of each subscale is the sum of the 10 items on it, resulting in a minimum score of 10 and a maximum score of 70. The SOC-3 was found to have good predictive, convergent and divergent validity. The typical alpha reliabilities for the subscales range from 0.75 to 0.80 on cross-validation samples. (Paulhus, D., 1981) Ethical Consideration

The study protocol was reviewed and approved by the Sri Ramachandra Ethics Committee for Student Proposals (SREC-SP) with the reference ID CSP/23/JUL/138/887.

The participants provided informed consent before taking part in the study. Voluntary participation and withdrawal without receiving any negative consequences were highlighted.

The study was conducted in accordance with the Good Clinical Practice and National Ethical Guidelines for Biomedical and Health Research involving Humans Participants. The Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology (STROBE) checklist and CHecklist for statistical Assessment of Medical Papers (the CHAMP statement) (Mansournia MA, et al, 2021) was used to guide the reporting of the study.

### PROCEDURE

Tamil translations of the instruments were developed in accordance with the translation protocol of EORTC quality of life group translation procedure (??). A google form containing informed consent forms, demographic questions as well as the instruments (in Tamil and English) were circulated among the participants. Participants were adequately informed about voluntary participation, right to withdrawal and confidentiality.

### Statistical Analysis

Google Sheets was used for data management. All data analyses were performed on R software (Version 4.3.1). Descriptive statistics, pearson's correlation, pearson's chi square, multiple regression analysis, one-way-ANOVA and Tukey's Honestly Significant Differences Test were performed.  $p < 0.05$  was regarded as statistically significant.

**Results Table 1**  
**Demographic Characteristics of the Sample**

		Entrepreneur	Homemaker	Working	Total	Chi	df	p
Family Structure	Extended	8	15	13	36	0.157	2	0.925
	Nuclear	22	40	41	103			
Divorced		0	0	1	1			

Marital Status	Married	28	54	50	132	6.373	6	0.383
	Separated	1	0	0	1			
	Widowed	1	1	3	5			

**Table 2**  
**Descriptive Statistics of Variables under Investigation**

	M	SD	W	p
Global Control	135.878	17.932	0.990	0.408
Personal Control	49.662	8.626	0.981	0.045*
Interpersonal Control	46.777	9.198	0.990	0.446
Socio-Political Control	39.439	6.524	0.993	0.749
Developmental Crisis	32.331	7.782	0.984	0.114

**Table 3**  
**Multiple Regression Analysis predicting Developmental Crisis**

	Estimate	SE	t	p
Intercept	46.339	4.960	9.342	0.00***
Personal Control	-0.094	0.083	-1.127	0.267
Interpersonal Control	-0.296	0.079	-3.754	0.00***
Socio-Political Control	0.114	0.096	1.188	0.237

Residual standard error: 7.192 on 135 degrees of freedom Multiple R-squared: 0.1643, Adjusted R-squared: 0.1457 F-statistic: 8.847 on 3 and 135 DF, p-value: 0.00

**Table 4**  
**Post-hoc Analysis**

		MD	SE	t	Ptukey
Personal Control	Entrepreneur Homemaker	1.164	1.914	0.608	0.816
	Entrepreneur Working	-3.404	1.920	-1.773	0.183
	Homemaker Working	-4.567	1.615	-2.827	0.015
Interpersonal Control	Entrepreneur Homemaker	4.842	2.023	2.394	0.047
	Entrepreneur Working	-0.411	2.030	-0.203	0.978

	Homemaker	Working	-5.254	1.707	-3.077	0.007
	Entrepreneur	Homemaker	5.397	3.972	1.359	0.366
Developmental Crisis	Entrepreneur	Working	-4.581	3.985	-1.150	0.485
	Homemaker	Working	-9.978	3.353	-2.976	0.010**

A total of 139 women between the ages of 35 and 65 were included as part of this study. Of the 139 women, 30 (21.583%) reported as being entrepreneurs, 55 (39.568%) reported as being homemakers and 54 (38.849%) reported as being salaried workers. The average age of the participants was found to be 46.45 (5.832). About 98% of the sample reported as being of middle socio-economic status. The descriptive data on socio-demographic attributes of the sample are presented in Table 1 Descriptive statistics and Shapiro-Wilk's Test for Normality for the variables under investigations are presented in Table 2. It is worth noting the Personal Control meets the required threshold for significance for non-normality.

### Relationship between Spheres of Control and Developmental Crisis

A multiple regression analysis conducted with Personal Control, Interpersonal Control and Socio-Political Control as predictors and Developmental Crisis as criterion is presented on Table 3. Interpersonal Control was found to be a significant predictor of Developmental Crisis, whereas Interpersonal Control and Socio-Political Control didn't meet the threshold for significance. The model's overall fit was statistically significant ( $F(3, 135) = 8.847$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ). The multiple R-squared value is 0.1643, suggesting that the model explains 16.43% of the variance in Developmental Crisis scores. The adjusted R-squared value is 0.1457, which adjusts for the number of predictors in the model.

### Difference in Levels of Control and Developmental Crisis across Groups

A one-way ANOVA conducted on Developmental Crisis ( $F(2, 136) = 5.694$ ,  $p = 0.00422$ ) revealed significant effects between the groups. For personal control, a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect on cases ( $F(2, 136) = 4.197$ ,  $p = 0.017$ ). Interpersonal control also had a significant effect on cases ( $F(2, 136) = 5.476$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ). However, socio-political control did not show a significant effect on cases ( $F(2, 136) = 0.137$ ,  $p = 0.872$ ). Post-hoc analysis (Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference) on the 2 variables are presented in Table 4.

The post-hoc analysis found that in comparison to Homemakers, Working individuals had significantly higher levels of personal control ( $t = -4.567$ ,  $p = 0.015$ ), interpersonal control ( $t = -5.254$ ,  $p = 0.007$ ) and lower levels of Developmental Crisis ( $t = -9.978$ ,  $p = 0.010$ ).

## DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that feelings of powerlessness or a lack of quality interactions within interpersonal relationships may lead to dissatisfaction and a reevaluation of one's identity and purpose, potentially contributing to the experience of a midlife crisis. Conversely, having quality interpersonal relationships can serve as a support system and aid in coping during challenging times.

Homemakers may experience feelings of limitedness due to societal expectations to have primary responsibility over family management and household chores. This role may contribute to their perceptions of lower levels of personal and interpersonal control. In contrast, working women tend to have larger social networks of colleagues and peers, which might lead to a perception of higher levels of interpersonal control.

The lack of significant differences in socio-political control across groups suggests that women, regardless of their occupational roles, perceive similar limitations in their ability to influence sociopolitical structures and

decisions. This perception may stem from the internalisation of societal norms and expectations regarding women's roles in the sociopolitical sphere.

Entrepreneurs may not experience significant differences in personal, interpersonal, and midlife crisis experiences compared to homemakers and working women. This could be because many entrepreneurs in India are primary caretakers of the family and run businesses from home, similar to homemakers. Additionally, entrepreneurs tend to have wider social networks and financial autonomy, similar to working women.

## STUDY LIMITATIONS

Firstly, the lack of longitudinal hinders exploration of temporal associations with the variables of interest. Further limited sample size and convenience sampling restrict generalizability of the results to the population of interest. Moreover the study was primarily based in Chennai and therefore the validity of the study may be restricted to this specific geographical location. Finally, while the Development Crisis Questionnaire was translated and its face validity established by experts, a formal psychometric evaluation in the Indian population was not conducted. This may affect the reliability and validity of the questionnaire in this context. These limitations must be taken into account during the interpretation of the results.

## SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the intricate relationship between Locus of Control and Midlife Crisis Experiences among women. The primary findings of this study are: 1) Interpersonal Control was found to be a significant predictor of Midlife Crisis Experience; 2) Homemakers experience significantly lower levels of Personal Control, Interpersonal Control and higher levels of Midlife Crisis Experience as compared to Working Women; 3) Socio-Political Control was found to have no significant difference across the 3 groups; 4) Entrepreneurs did not differ from Homemakers or Working women with respect to Control or Midlife Crisis Experience Study Implications Tailored interventions to address feelings of powerlessness and dissatisfaction could be developed to improve the mental health of women. Such interventions could focus on enhancing support systems and coping mechanisms for women experiencing midlife crises. Educating women about socio-political structures and encouraging them to actively participate in socio-political decision-making could help empower them and tackle challenges associated with societal norms and expectations regarding their roles. Furthermore, community-based programs and support networks could be developed to provide women with opportunities for social interaction and support. Finally, the current study can inform policies aimed at improving the social and economic status of women.

## Directions for Future Studies

For future research, it would be beneficial to expand upon the current findings by exploring the policy implications and cross-cultural differences. Developing intervention studies that focus on women's locus of control and its influence on developmental crises could be valuable. Additionally, future studies should aim to overcome the limitations of the current study by using representative samples, longitudinal designs, and culturally validated measures.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, the findings of the current study provide insights into the intricate relationships between various Spheres of Control and Midlife Crisis Experiences among Women. The study underscores the need for tailored interventions to address feelings of powerlessness and dissatisfaction among women, as well as the importance of empowering women in socio-political decision-making. We hope that the current research will stimulate further investigation in this area

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#### Contributor ship:

1. VR conceived the idea and wrote the first draft
2. DKJ was involved design, and analysis
3. RL was involved design & project administration
4. LL was involved in data curation and analysis
5. RPD contributed during subsequent versions of this manuscript, and all approved its current final version.

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**Data Availability:** De-identified participant data that support the findings of this study are available from the first author, VR, upon reasonable request. To access the data, please contact the author at [reeishik@gmail.com] and specify how the data will be used and cite this article in your publications.